

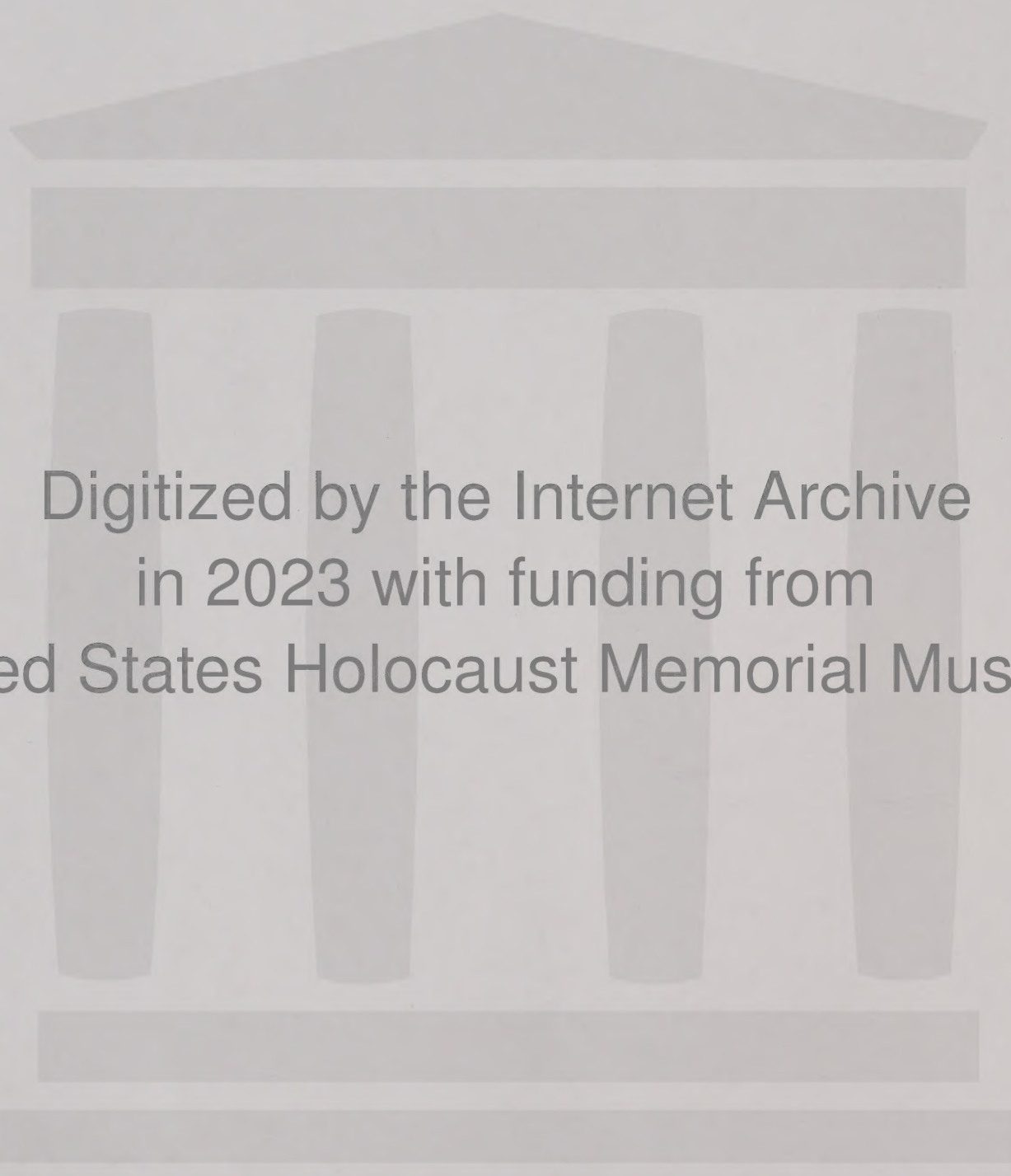


ועידת התביעות
Claims Conference
Conference on Jewish Material Claims
Against Germany

Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection

Access to the print and/or digital copies of memoirs in this collection is made possible by USHMM on behalf of us, and with the support of, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum respects the copyright and other intellectual property rights associated with the materials in its collection and makes good faith efforts to determine the copyright status of such materials. The Museum has a good faith belief that the materials in this collection may be made publicly available. The Museum welcomes additional information about copyright status. If you have additional information or concerns about the copyright ownership of materials in this collection, please contact the Museum's Library by phone at 202-479-9717 or by email at reference@ushmm.org.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2023 with funding from
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

<https://archive.org/details/bib292095>

Journey into the Unknown

by

Magda Herzberger

JOURNEY INTO THE UNKNOWN

by

Magda Herzberger

Copyright © 2001, by Magda Herzberger

Journey into the Unknown

by

Magda Herzberger

My love for the outdoors and the countryside grew in the course of time. As a child I always loved to walk outdoors in the fall and summer, looking at the trees and the changing leaves. So, I was walking one day in the countryside. It was the season of fall, my favorite one. I could see the fallen leaves on the ground. The wind picked them up, and they were dancing on the stony, earthy road I was treading. But as I was going along, enjoying that lovely scenery so much, it was getting colder and colder. The winds started to pick up and all the leaves were flying in the air.

There were no houses around me where I could go in and take some shelter as it became quite cold. I was inappropriately dressed for that kind of temperature. But as I was going along trying to find a place where I could go in and ask for shelter, it was getting much colder. Strangely enough, the fall scenery changed into a winter scene.

As I looked up, I could see that all the trees had lost their leaves. They were empty and bare, and the snow was falling heavier and heavier. Big flakes were coming down. The wind picked up, and the snow was getting deeper and deeper within a short period of time.

As I was going along, I was trying to fight the cold and the winds. I was stepping

more and more into deeper snow. At one point, I got terrified because I thought that if I don't find any shelter soon, I will perish there. I had no winter clothing on me and no place where I could warm up. The wind was blowing wildly and the snow was coming down heavily, everything was in a cloud and I could hardly see. But I still kept on going.

I started running in order to keep myself warm. I was running and running, and I had no idea for how long of a time will I run, but I thought "Well, I can keep it up because I used to be a marathon runner and if I could run twenty-six miles nonstop, maybe I can survive and maybe it is not going to be that long."

It seemed, though, that it took a long time and I could still not see anything in sight - no houses except the winter scene. It was a snow storm and the wind was pushing the snowflakes sideways. They were hitting my face and my eyes. Then, I could see the outline of something at a distance, and I wasn't sure what it was. I was running towards it.

As I came closer, I realized that it was a building, but it was a very strange looking building, like from another age. It was made out of heavy stone. It looked almost like a building from the Middle Ages, but as I approached it, I realized that it looked to me more like a church. But still, it wasn't a church, because it didn't have all the characteristics of a church. The building was made out of heavy concrete stones. It

looked impenetrable. I was wondering how will I be able to even get into that building, because of its heavy stone doors. Nevertheless, I was desperate and I started banging on those heavy doors and I was yelling, "Please! Please! I need help! Please! Please! Someone should come and help me! I am cold and I am freezing. I need some shelter."

But it seemed that nobody heard me and I was wondering what did those doors remind me of? They reminded me of bunker doors in Germany where I was taken to the German concentration camps during the Holocaust being of Jewish faith. We were working on the streets as slave laborers in Bremen. Bremen was the second largest haven in Germany; it was bombed day and night. It had bunkers and shelters. They reminded me of those shelters. The shelters had heavy concrete doors. They did not open very easily to pressure. That was the only way to survive terrific bombardments. Bremen was bombed during World War Two day and night by the Allied Forces and we were working as prisoners there, five hundred women selected from Auschwitz, to drag the corpses of aerial victims from the streets and also to clear the ruins of the city.

I was thinking "Nobody is going to hear me. I'm just going to perish here. I am going to collapse in front of this door and die."

But then to my amazement, the heavy door was gradually opening and in the doorway was standing a figure. I recognized him. It was Elijah, the prophet. I had a

liking of Elijah, the prophet, as a child, because I grew up with the Jewish tradition. My father performed beautifully at Passover, the ritual of the Seder. I remember the beautiful Jewish tradition and ritual. The thoughts and memories of it kept me alive in the camps during my captivity in the German concentration camps, because I wanted to come back in order to see my father performing again that beautiful Seder ritual. But my father was killed in the camps, he never came back. It was a custom at the end of the ritual to leave a glass of wine on the table, because, as a child I was told that Elijah, the prophet, is going to stop by at night and bless the house and drink from the ritual cup. I believed it as a child and in the morning I was rushing, rushing to the table looking if the wine was still there. The wine was always gone. I said, "Ah, Elijah was here."

Elijah looked just like I imagined that he would look in my dreams, in my childhood dreams. He was tall and had a long white beard. He looked stately and he was wearing a white robe, like the kind of robe my father was wearing at the ritual performing the Seder. The Seder, which means order, was very symbolic. It was something that I was always thinking of in my hardest times when my life was threatened in the German concentration camps. When I felt that my strength was ebbing, I could see, in my imagination, my father performing the Seder, and that gave me the motivation and desire to go on living. I could see, also, like in a dream, Elijah, the prophet, visiting and

blessing our house.

I was very surprised when actually Elijah, the prophet, appeared at the door, and I knew in my heart that it was a good sign. I looked at him and he was wearing a golden chain. A golden key was attached to it. Elijah looked at me and I said, "Oh, you must be prophet Elijah who came and blessed our house every year at our big holiday, the Passover. Please help me now, I am desperate. Please give me shelter."

Elijah looked at me and said, "Well, come in my child." I came in and I could see that the building from the inside didn't look like it did from outside. It wasn't really reminding me of the Middle Ages, because it looked like a big house with several floors and the lower part was like a corridor. From this corridor you could see some doors on the left and on the right, and I could see a staircase going up on the other floors. It looked to me like it was a building which had about three floors. I said to Elijah, "I would like to go into one of the rooms which maybe has some heat in it, so I could warm up."

Elijah said, "Well, here all of these doors are locked. You should know that. But I am going to give you this golden key which will open the right door for you." He placed the golden key into my palm and then disappeared.

The key looked like one which could open all the doors, like in a hotel room when you have a master key which opens all the doors. That's what I was thinking. But this

wasn't the case. At first I tried the doors on my right and it didn't open the doors on my right. I tried to open the doors on the left. Nothing opened. I ran upstairs. I said, "My God all the doors are locked." But I thought maybe I should go down and check again - I might have missed a door in this huge building.

I ran down again and it seemed to me that at the end of the corridor there was a door and I was sure I did not try that one before. I knew it because it had a different color, it was painted white. I couldn't understand that because all the other doors had the natural wood color. I was thinking, "How come I missed that one?" My thoughts were that probably in my desperation, I just was running back and forth and I didn't pay enough attention, because I was so stressed out.

I inserted the golden key in the door lock, I turned it to the left and opened the door.

I found myself in a long corridor which looked like an art gallery with no pictures on its walls. It was heated and the warmth felt good to my chilled body. There wasn't any furniture around, not even a chair to sit on. Nevertheless, it was a cozy place where finally I could warm up. I was wondering if I should stay there for awhile.

But then as I looked, I could see one picture on the wall which wasn't there before when I entered the corridor. I was wondering how did that picture get there. I thought that maybe I was so desperate to find shelter that it might have been there and I didn't

notice it. Definitely, it was a picture there hanging on the wall. As I looked at the picture, I couldn't believe my eyes. It was a charcoal sketch of my great-grandmother on my father's side whom I never knew. But I was familiar with the picture. I remembered the picture; I will never forget it, because it was hanging in our living room in our home, through the years. I was born and raised in the Northern part of Transylvania, Romania in the city of Cluj, the capital of Transylvania. When I was seven years old the Jewish persecution started and being Jewish we couldn't have a house anymore so we had to move to smaller apartments as time went on, because of the discrimination which got worse and worse in the course of time. When Hitler occupied our city in 1944 we were deported to the German concentration camps. We had to leave our home and everything we had was looted. This picture of my great grandmother was with us until that time. I grew up with it. I adored this picture through all the years of my childhood. I never knew my great-grandmother, because she died well before I was born. We just had this picture of her. The hunchback who did the work was a great artist. He was never really recognized as a great artist. He was working in a small photographic shop and people would come in and ask him to draw their portraits. But that portrait of my great-grandmother was living. Her whole personality was captured in it. And I liked to look at it at different stages in my life as I was growing up. She looked so pretty and she was not

that young anymore. Maybe she was in her fifties at the time when her picture was drawn. She had a distinguished look about her and she had a hairdo which actually looked like the hairdo I am wearing now. She had long hair and it was put up in a big bun and fastened with numerous hairpins. It's the way I'm wearing my hair now. And many people said that I have a great resemblance with her. Although I never knew her, through that picture, I thought that she was living with us in the house.

When the Germans came in and we were taken to the concentration camps in 1944, they broke into our house, they put us in the ghettos, and then they deported us to the concentration camps. We had to leave everything behind. We were robbed of everything. Our house was looted. And we never found the picture of my great grandmother.

When I came back from the German concentration camps in 1945, fortunately my mother survived. Much of my family was killed, including my father. And we never found that picture. Maybe somebody looked at it, and took it out of the frame. Maybe they wanted the frame, what else? They could not relate to the picture of my great grandmother and they might have just discarded it in the garbage can. The thought terrified me.

But there it was. I found the picture and I was so happy. I kept on looking at it

and savoring it like something you have lost for a long time and then when you find it you want to look at it in order to be convinced that it is real. The picture definitely looked real. But a strange thing happened. As I looked at it more and more, it seemed to me that the picture was coming alive. It seemed to me that my great-grandmother's face was coming alive and she was smiling at me. She was dressed in a high necked dress with a collar and big sleeves. Then, she lifted her arm and she made a sign, she beckoned to me with her index finger.

It was so strange but I was happy. On the other hand I was wondering what was happening to me. Do I see things that don't exist? Am I losing my sanity? Am I hallucinating? But I didn't care, because it made me so happy seeing my Great grandmother coming alive, that nothing else mattered. So if I am insane and I see her, that's good enough for me.

But then, not only was she beckoning to me, but her lips started moving and she was talking to me. She said "Come here. Come here my great-granddaughter. I know that you always liked me. I knew that many times you wanted to know me. And now, you have a chance to do it."

I said, "It's true! It's true, great-grandmother! I can't even remember your name."

She said, "It's not important what name I have, but here I am talking to you."

"Great-grandmother, I always admired you, and wanted to know you. I felt so sad when we lost this picture of you. It was the only thing which connected me with you."

"I know. I know how you felt. We are going to make up for it now." She asked, "Do you really want to know me?"

"Yes. Yes. I want to know you. I want to come close to you."

She said, "Then do you see? Look behind my picture. Come and lift it up a little bit. At the corner of my frame there is a button. Push this button because behind my picture, there is a secret door."

I pushed the button and a secret door opened and I found myself in a huge room. It looked like a ballroom in another century. I had seen dancers, men, women, in pairs. They were wearing their rococo outfits and wigs on their heads. There was a beautiful music performed, and somebody was playing the piano. Although I wasn't familiar with that music, I was wondering "Is that the waltz of Strauss?", because people were waltzing. And who is the one who plays the piano so beautifully? Who is the artist? I walked through the crowd, but it seemed to me that nobody paid attention to me. I could see the black grand piano. And by the piano, my great grandmother was playing.

I was thinking, "Oh my God! My great-grandmother is here, and I remembered

that piano. That piano, that black grand piano was in the house of my grandparents. I have seen it. I loved it as a child. I remember the times when I was only three years old and went with my parents to my grandmother's house. As soon as we arrived there I was running to the piano room. I was playing and trying to compose little songs, children songs, my own songs, my own compositions. I would stay there for hours sometimes and nobody could take me away from the piano. They really had to come in several times and they would practically have to pull me out from that piano room, I was thinking how much I wanted to play my piano at that age. I was pleading with my parents, I wanted to learn to play the piano. But at that time, there was a belief that children at an early age should not be burdened with too much mental work. They should enjoy their carefree childhood. It was considered detrimental to teach a child an instrument at an early age. As time went on and I became a teenager, I finally convinced my parents - actually my uncle who was the fencing champion of Romania (he was killed in the camps too), to find a piano teacher for me. And he found for me the best teacher, I remember him. He was an artist, a concert pianist at age twelve. When I was a teenager there was a strong Jewish persecution. Because he was Jewish, they wouldn't let him play anymore in concerts and he had to make a living by giving piano lessons. He was my best teacher. But that grand piano evoked in me memories from childhood when I had listened to one

of my aunts playing the piano so beautifully. I could listen for hours to the music.

And now there was this beautiful music and my great-grandmother was playing, I went to her and I said, "Oh, I never knew, nobody told me that you were a concert pianist."

"Well," she said, "You find out more about me now."

"Oh, can you teach me to play? You play so beautifully."

She said, "Well, I have to play now for these people who are dancing. Why don't you mingle with them and find somebody, a partner?"

"Meet the people," my great-grandmother said. "Meet some of the people who are here."

I tried to do that. I went to a couple and asked, "Could you please find for me a partner? Is there anyone who would like to dance with me?"

The dancing couple looked at me. I asked them, "Why am I not noticed? Why nobody pays attention to me?"

They both told me, "Well, look at yourself. Look at the way that you are dressed up and look at us. You don't belong here. You are not one of us."

"But I want to be one of you. I want to stay here. My great grandmother is here playing the piano and she's one of you, so I must be belonging to you too. I must belong

to this place.”

“No, you don’t. Besides, look at yourself. You are out of place. You are from another age. You don’t belong here.”

I tried to convince the man and the woman that I am and that I can be one of them if they would help me. I could be helped to be dressed like them, if that is the requirement, if my attire is disturbing. Otherwise, I tried to explain that I am the same human being as they are and that we have something in common. Is that so important the way I am dressed? That should not make a difference. They said, “But it does make a difference. It does make a difference, because you can never be like one of us.”

“What do I have to do to belong and be one of you?”

To my amazement, they said, “You have to be born at a different time. You have to be born here in this century. That’s where we belong. But you are an outcast. We don’t want you here. And we ask you, please leave and find the place where you truly belong.”

I was practically guided out, thrown out in other words, and I was very upset because I couldn’t even go back to talk to my great grandmother. I was practically taken out totally from that room. Then, I was wondering where I should go from there. I decided to walk up another flight of stairs. I said to myself, “Well, on the third floor

there should be a place where I belong.”

I left the second floor, where my great grandmother was playing the piano, and I was heading for the third floor. Maybe that is the place where I belong. Maybe that's where I will be accepted.

I ran up on the third floor and I had the same experience - all the doors were locked. So again, I could open only one door with my golden key. When I opened that door, I had a similar scene, only the people looked different. They were dancing to a different tune. My great grandmother wasn't at the piano. It wasn't even a piano playing anymore. It was a weird music and I was wondering what instrument was playing. I could not identify it, because it sounded to me, strangely enough, like a music box. I thought that maybe there is one of those upright pianos playing by itself. I looked around, but I could not see anything and I was wondering where the music came from. It was very strange, because I could not see a musical instrument in sight. I didn't see a music box either and yet, the room was filled with music. Not the music that I really cared for. It didn't have the beautiful melodies of Strauss. It didn't have the great spiritual strength of Beethoven. There was no light music, or music of the eighteenth century or sixteenth century composers; it was something that I was totally unfamiliar with. I could not detect a pleasing melody to my ears. But still, the dancers were dancing

in the right rhythm.

But now what struck me was that there was something strange about the dancers, the way they moved. It was the way they were bending. There was something abnormal in their movements and I could not conceive what it was or what was causing it. There was a stiffness in their movements. There was also a stiffness in their facial expressions. But I figured, “Well, it’s only maybe because I’m reading too much into all that. Maybe I have to get familiarized with these people. Maybe I will understand even the music, if I know where it comes from or what it is.”

I accosted a dancing pair and I asked both of them, “Well, where am I?” “I came here and I hope that I’m going to be met with friendliness because I was in another place on the second floor where practically I was thrown out. I hope that I am going to be accepted here.”

At first, there was no answer. It seemed almost like they were ignoring me. And not only they, but as I looked around I noticed that no one else paid attention to me. I was thinking, “Oh my God! This is a repetition of my experience from before.”

I asked again the couple, they were the only ones who would maybe talk to me, “Could I stay here? Could I? Could I find a partner for myself to dance?”

I was told the following. “You don’t belong here. I don’t know how you got

here, but you are not one of us.”

I said, “Well, I am a human being. I tried to explain it on the second floor that we have things in common like all human beings. Why am I thrown out from everywhere? Why doesn’t anyone want to accept me?”

They said, “Well, look around. There’s a question whether we are human beings.”

“What do you mean? You look like human beings.”

“Did you notice something about us which bothers you?”

I said, “Not really.”

“Come on, come on. If you want to be one of us we want to hear your opinion about us.”

“I noticed some kind of stiffness in your movements. Well, no wonder, I don’t know how long you have been dancing this dance. Maybe all of you are dancing for hours here and you are tired.”

The couple said, “No. you might be surprised and shocked to hear that we are not human beings.”

“How come you are not human beings?”

“We are actually robots. You don’t belong here. You are a human being and we

are robots. We are programmed.”

“I can’t believe it.”

The man, who looked like a young man with dark hair, very dark eyes, and nicely built body, said, “You really want to find out about us?”

I said, “Yes.”

He said, “I can prove it.” He opened his jacket. He pulled it aside and opened the buttons on his shirt and I could see that he looked like a mechanical robot figure indeed, run by some kind of a gadget.

I was horrified. Then, everybody was against me. All the people, all the persons who were dancing in the ballroom, were yelling, “You get out of here! You are out of place! We don’t want you here! You don’t belong here!” I was thrown out from that room too.

I was getting chilly again and I found myself in another corridor on the third floor. Interestingly enough, as I looked around I noticed that this corridor, on the third floor, was different. I noticed that there were more doors there than it seemed to me before. There were doors there which I did not even try to open and I was thinking, “How come I always open the wrong doors? What is wrong with me? Maybe I don’t pay enough attention. Maybe I am so obsessed with the idea that I want to belong somewhere, that in

the process I lose my good judgment and I am guided by my instincts and not ~~with~~ ^{by} my reason.” I tried to open the doors which I didn’t notice before but I had the same problem with my key as before. My key didn’t fit in any of the doors.

But then, my eyes fell on a door at the far end of the corridor. It had a white background and there were paintings on it. I looked at it with amazement. There was a picture consisting of two fruit trees and birds painted with beautiful vibrant water colors.

I was thinking, “This door is familiar. I have seen it before.” Then it dawned on me. This looks like the entrance door of our former residence. The difference was that our residence door looked like that on the inside part, not the outside one. It also had a white background with the picture of two fruit trees and birds painted with vibrant colors but the picture also included a black and white gate which looked like the entrance gate to a garden. The picture always reminded me of true Paradise. A Paradise without the presence of the Evil Snake.

I was pondering, “Well, now this key must fit this door, because this is a familiar door and this was our entrance door, to our house. I put the key into the key lock hole and indeed, it fit perfectly. I opened that door, but, I didn’t find the paradise I was looking for. Instead, I realized that I was in a jungle.

I was terrified. I wasn’t cold anymore because it was pretty warm, in the

environment. But I was totally alone in the jungle and to my horror, I saw three mountain lions, coming my way. I was sure that this time something horrible is going to happen. I thought that I was fooled by this beautiful door, thinking that this is a good omen, but I opened the wrong door, the door I would never have liked to open. And then, the lions stopped and they were looking at me. But one of them, the one in the middle came forward, and as she approached me, I realized that it was a female mountain lion whose photo I have seen recently in our local Arizona paper. It was in The Times, our paper which is published weekly in the city where we are residing. I was very surprised when I read the accompanying article. They were talking about Sandy the mountain lioness who is actually visiting our community, and in the paper were also hints, what you should do when you meet Sandy. It was told that Sandy has two cubs. She is circling our area. They were writing, "Don't be surprised if one day you find Sandy the mountain lioness in your backyard." I was hoping that she was a good natured lioness, especially having two cubs. I was really worried because I know that, wild animals can be more dangerous when they have cubs. And that goes for the bears, too.

As I looked I saw next to Sandy two little cubs. But the cubs stayed with the big lions, the other lions, and only Sandy came forward. She looked at me. I just read in the article what you should do, the do's and the don'ts when you meet a mountain lion. First,

think what you should do. Just don't run, that's the worst thing to do, because they will run after you and identify you as their prey. Look into their eyes, make yourself look big and lift your hands, holler and scream so that you make yourself important, to show that you have power. I was just trying to do that. I extended my arms and made myself look bigger. I looked at her and I was trying to holler, but Sandy didn't go away. She started talking to me.

"You know, I am surprised that you behave like that. I mean, why do you want to make yourself bigger? Why do you want to holler like that? Are you afraid of me or don't you have good manners?"

I said, "Sure. I am afraid. I don't know you and I don't know what you want to do to me."

"Why are you afraid of me?"

"I'm afraid of you and I'm afraid of this jungle and the wild animals here."

"Do you think that all wild animals are nasty?"

"No, I don't think so." I came initially to a three story house which I don't see anymore, to find shelter from the raging storm outside where I was wandering, losing my way. I was let into that building but nobody accepted me there, although I tried to find a place where I could belong. I was thrown out of there. I tried to find the right place for

myself where I truly belong and I found myself thrown into this jungle. I know for sure that I don't belong here either. I am afraid you are going to kill me."

Sandy said, "Well, do you think really that I'm such a nasty lioness? I don't kill when I don't have to. And think of it, what do we do in this jungle? We kill because we want to survive. The only reason we kill is because we want to eat."

"Well, I hope that you're not going to eat me up."

"Well, you really don't know this jungle. I can tell you one or two things about it, too. I think that many of you people are much worse than we are. We kill because we want to eat, but look what you do. What do you do? You kill because you want to have power. You are making wars with each other. We are territorialists too. But each of us has a territory and we respect each other's territories. But many times in the world of you ~~z~~ s human beings, territories are not respected and everybody wants the territory of the other person. For that you kill and you maim."

"Sandy, I am glad that you talk that way, but I really would like to have your help, if you are good natured, please help me to get out of here, because I really don't belong here."

"Well, look here. I have two little cubs and I have to take care of them. But I will help you. Before you leave this jungle, I want you to learn what it means to be an

intruder in a real jungle.” You are in a sort of a jungle when you are in the outside world. You are in a jungle when you are in with the other human beings, a jungle of a different kind. Where one destroys the other, not because of lack of food, but because of the search for power.”

“Sandy, don’t you have wars here?”

“Well, our wars here are for the fight for food. But if we have plenty of food and everyone has enough, then we don’t fight for it; everyone eats his share or her share of the food. We work here too. You think that only human beings are the ones who work hard. You always say you want to be free outdoors, live like the animals live, but didn’t you ever think of our hard lives? We also have to make a living. Our living is hunting. But what do you do? What some of the humans are doing? Think of it. They hunt for pleasure and they kill us. They kill more of us than we kill human beings. We are more killed in the jungle than we kill others. We don’t attack human beings, only when we are attacked. But before you leave this place, I want you to understand us animals of the jungle. I don’t want you to think that we are evil. And I want you to learn what the real jungle is like and what it means to be really evil.”

“Sandy, I’m really pleased that I met you. But at this point, I would still like to get out of this jungle and get somewhere where I belong. Would you help me?”

“Yes. I can’t leave the jungle, because ~~it is~~^{is} my place here, but I can lead you out of this jungle to the gate where you can leave this place.” Sandy opened the gate and let me out there. Then she closed it tightly behind me and disappeared.

As I passed the gate, everything changed. I said to myself, “Finally, I came to the place where I truly belong.

I entered a beautiful forest and I had seen the tall maple trees. The air was pleasant. It was summer. I was thinking, “Oh, I am so glad to see again these beautiful trees.” They remind me of the Midwest where I lived for so long, for so many years. That also reminds me of the place where I grew up in the northern part of Transylvania, Romania where there are beautiful forests and mountains around. I wanted so many times to see this place, because now we live in the desert in the state of Arizona. I got to like the desert and its vegetation and wildlife. We have trees, flowers, and mountains around us, but the maple trees somehow reminded me of the place where I grew up.

I was very happy. I felt young again. Somehow this whole environment rejuvenated me as I was walking in those deep forests with many trees. I noticed a beautiful, unusually large tree. It was an apple tree. I said to myself, “I have never seen such a beautiful apple tree.” The apples were gorgeous and I wanted to pick one of them. I looked up at the tree, trying to assess how tall it is. Then I saw a figure perched up

there.

“Oh, I knew what that figure reminded me of. Mephisto the Devil, in *Faust*, the opera. He was even dressed like him. He had a feather in his hat. It was strange. Then, I couldn’t control myself, I felt like saying out loud, “Who the Devil are you?”

Then I told myself, “Well, I am usually very well-mannered, I didn’t want to use this word, but it was a slip of the tongue.”

But the answer was, “I am the Devil. By the way, would you like to have an apple?”

I said, “Under no conditions will I have an apple from you.”

“Well, what is wrong with me? I know what you’re thinking.”

“How come you know what I’m thinking?”

“Because I can read your mind. I know what you are thinking. You are thinking of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.”

“No, “I’m thinking of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and the Snake.”

Under no condition will I bite into your apple.”

“Well,” he said, “This isn’t the Garden of Eden. You are here just by yourself. And by the way, I’m coming down to meet you.”

He came down bringing a most beautiful apple. That apple really looked like the

one which I have seen in those movies, when they were playing *Snow White*. The apple was red, nice and ripe. He asked me, "Can you have a bite of my apple? It is really good."

"Under no condition will I have a bite of this."

"It's not poisonous. You suspect me of putting poison in your apple?"

"I don't know, because you claim to be the Devil and you look like it, and I don't want to be tricked by the Devil."

"Well, how did you get into this forest, into this mess that you are in?"

"I got in this mess, because I was looking for the right place for myself and I didn't find it."

"Do you think that you are now in the right place?"

"No. How can I be in the right place with the Devil around?"

"Well, don't be afraid of me. If you collaborate with me, I can help you."

"Under no circumstances will I collaborate with you and participate in your evil deeds and treacherous tricks."

"I think it might behoove you to listen to me considering in what predicament you put yourself in when you entered my garden."

"Because you tricked me."

“So, am I at fault for your own stupidity and carelessness?”

“Yes, you are. If you would have put up a warning sign on your gate as follows:

Beware the Devil. Don't open this gate - I would have never entered your territory.”

“What do you take me for, an idiot? No one would enter Hell this way and I would run out of souls. That would be bad business for me. I will lose my reputation.

“But you must understand that considering all that, I can't trust you. And therefore, I don't want to have anything to do with you. You are fooling people like me! Why do you create such a beautiful landscape totally unfit for the gates of Hell?”

“Because I want to give the impression of being in Paradise. The beauty of the landscape has a bewitching effect. So you can feel well before you enter the fires of Hell.”

“All I want is to get out of here to a place where I truly belong.”

“What is wrong being in Hell? Remember you were once there in the concentration camps of Auschwitz in Germany. You have seen the flames of Hell.”

“I was forcibly and unjustly taken there against my will, just as you lured me here with your evil tricks and deceit. I never want to be in such a horrible situation again. God saved me then and he will save me now.”

“I don't think that you realize that you have to be nice and courteous to me. How

else can you count on my help to let you free? This is my domain and I am the absolute ruler of the Underground. Besides, this place is much larger than it seems and considering your bad sense of direction, you will never get out of here. In the meanwhile, I can fulfill some of your wishes and dreams. First of all, I can give you youth. Considering your age, it might be beneficial to you. There are very few older women like yourself who can resist this temptation. Think of what fortunes are spent on cosmetic surgery, for anti-wrinkle creams, youth potions, rejuvenating lotions. I can give you instant beauty. I can be your genie at your service.”

“I am not dumb. I don’t like the price I would have to pay for it.”

“It would involve only your soul. Nothing more.”

“My soul is the most precious to me. It belongs to my Creator at all times while I am alive and after I am gone. Besides, I am able to face the truth and accept the loss of my youth. Some gray hair and wrinkles I gradually accumulate don’t bother me. I’m not unhappy nor perturbed. The beauty of my soul is well preserved and I’m intending to keep it that way too. Therefore, I don’t succumb to your temptation. I don’t make any deals with the Devil.”

“Then I have another proposition which might be more appealing to you. It might be an interesting experience for you to see and to meet the notorious Nazi criminals for

example Adolf Hitler, Adolf Eichmann, Dr. Joseph Mengele, Irma Greze, Rudolph Ferdinand Hoess, Kramer - the Beast of Bergen-Belsen, Dr. Karl Klauberg, Mary Mendel, all of them are in Hell. Would you like to know what became of them?"

"I can forego my curiosity. I hope that they were burned in Hell."

"Not exactly. You will see what happened to them if you come with me for a visit to Hell."

"You can't tempt me with anything. As I told you before, I don't make any deals with the Devil."

"Don't you understand that if you don't make any deal with me, you will never get out of here? You are in my power and under my spell. Be reasonable. We can make an agreement whereby I state that you are only a visitor in Hell for the sole purpose to see the fate of the infamous Nazi criminals who killed your father and many members of your family, and who were responsible for killing six million Jews like you. You are a survivor. They almost killed you too. If we come to some kind of agreement, I will help you to get out of here."

"I don't trust you, but I realize that I'm in your grip. But if I have to make any deal with you in order to obtain my freedom from you, I want to maintain my rights too. You have to accept my demands and sign your name under mine. You have to agree that

if I go for a visit to Hell for the sole purpose mentioned above, I will not become an inmate and that you promise me to set me free.”

“Who is your lawyer here? What are you talking about? I alone make all the laws. you still don’t understand that you are under my power and spell. I don’t ever sign my name for any of my business deals, and I’m not doing it for you either. Who do you think you are? I’ll tell you who you are. You’re a powerless human being at my mercy, lost in my domain.”

“That’s what you think. I am not helpless. One thing I know is that a greater power is ruling over you. God is my protector. Being Jewish, I am a member of His chosen people. He liberated me from the hell of the Holocaust and he will free me from here too. I have the Shield of David with me. I always carry it along. Look, it is hidden here under my garment.” I pulled out the Star of David and put it in the front of the Devil’s eyes. I didn’t know for sure if it will work. I knew that his power diminishes if you show him the cross. But to my surprise, the Devil became more and more humble. I could see him trembling and his might diminishing. “Well, do you agree to put your signature accepting my terms if I make an agreement with you?”

“You just told me before that you don’t trust me. Aren’t you afraid that I will trick you?”

“No. Because if you break the rules of our agreement, then you’ll have to deal with God and your punishment will be great. I know that you fear only God. You will be locked in your Hell forever and you will never be able to face the world. You will be banished forever from the face of the earth. That would please me indeed. It would be wonderful if the evil spirit of yours would not exist anymore.”

“I will always exist as long as mankind lives on earth. A certain amount of evil is built-in in every human soul. Only the degree of it varies. There is no total purity in none of the humans. You consider yourselves the superior race. You trick each other, tear each other apart. Treachery, deceit, envy, greed, jealousy, cruelty, brutality, power, passion for power, are among the human traits. Think of the crimes some of you commit. Your prisons are filled with criminals. As you can see, nobody can annihilate me. Angels live in Heaven, and I live on earth and beneath it. The Devil existed even in Paradise. How else could Adam and Eve taste the forbidden fruit and be banished from there? Even the Angels in Heaven didn’t observe me being there. As you can see, I am clever and cunning. How do you explain that temptation existed even in Heaven ever since Man was born? But how else could Mankind itself be born if Adam and Eve would not have tasted the Fruit of Knowledge? How else would people multiply? So, you see, I will never die. I am tolerated to a certain extent even by the Ruler of the sky. But I have

to admit that I have my limitations. God has power over me, therefore, I will sign my name accepting your conditions. This time you tricked me, therefore, you are not very welcome to stay for long in Hell. You are too close to God and I don't like that. I will help you and I will take you out of here and I will liberate you from Hell. But no matter how cunning you think you are, you have to realize that you are still under my spell and, therefore, you have to follow me to Hell."

I walked with the Devil. We passed a beautiful forest with its tall, hard maple and oak trees. I felt the intoxicating sweet fragrance of wild flowers in the air. I noticed some beautiful red roses emerging their colorful heads from the tall green grass.

After a while, the landscape changed. We were treading on a bare, rocky, stony surface. The outline of a big building gradually emerged. It looked like a huge castle with high towers carved out of heavy boulders. From its large chimneys huge flames were belching and the air was filled with a strange, sickening, sweetish odor of burning flesh. It reminded me of the crematories of Auschwitz. The Hell of the Holocaust was facing me. The heavy stone entrance door was locked. It had a sign on it: 'The Ports of Hell.'

The Devil opened the door with his key. We entered a very large room looking like an office. There was a big desk placed in the center of the room. To my horror and

outrage, Adolf Hitler was sitting behind it. There was a big stack of files placed in front of him. There were a number of other desks placed all along the right and the left side of Hitler's desk. I recognized the infamous Nazi criminals sitting behind them: Adolf Eichmann, Himmler, Dr. Joseph Mengele, Irma Greze, Dr. Kline, Dr. Karl Klauburg, on the right, and Rudolph Ferdinand Hoess, Kramer- the Beast of Bergen-Belsen, Mary Mendel, on the left.

I asked the Devil, "What are these monsters doing here?"

The Devil answered, "They are my most important collaborators. They have the highest positions in Hell."

"How come they earned so many privileges, so much distinction here? They should have been burned in the fires of Hell a long time ago. I am a Holocaust survivor. They deserve the highest punishment for the murder of six million Jewish people."

"But where will I find more suitable evil souls to work for me in Hell?"

"What exactly are they doing here?"

"Whatever they did in the concentration camps of Germany when you were their prisoner. They torture, experiment, and burn the souls. I find them very helpful."

Suddenly, I saw all of them looking at me and smiling, and telling the Devil, "So, finally you brought us this last Jew? We were waiting all these years to have one at our

hands to get rid of. We have to think of all the methods of torture which were perfected through the past years. We will apply the best torture devices before putting her in the furnace. We didn't see a Jew in a long time, so let's try to make the best of this one at hand."

"Do you think that I am the last Jew on earth? I have to inform you that you couldn't annihilate all of us. Some of us, like myself, survived and we have many generations of living Jews."

"Yes, but we didn't manage to kill you in the camps so we are going to do it here."

But the Devil picked up the conversation and intervened, "You can't do that no matter how strong your desires are. You are dead souls. You lost your power to harm any living outsider."

"But you have the power to do it," they said unanimously.

The Devil looked at me with a friendly smile. I detected a mischievous glimmer in his eyes. "Ignore them," he said, "Come with me now to our big furnace. Would you would like to see who will burn there next?"

At this point, I became suspicious of his intentions and I pulled out again my Star of David and pointed at him. "No tricks. Remember, God is with me. I am one of His

chosen people.”

I barely finished my sentence when a terrific rumble was heard, followed by a loud, powerful, sharp whistling sound - similar to the sound of a falling bomb before hitting its target. Then, a big detonation took place not too far from where I was standing. I could see a part of the thick wall of the chamber where I was torn out by an invisible force providing for me an opening through which I could run for safety.

As soon as I was outside, I saw a big, raging fire descending upon the Nazi criminals. The huge flames engulfed and consumed their wicked souls. I could see the Devil shaking, trembling with fright and disappearing.

I heard a voice telling me, “Don’t fear the Devil anymore. God is with you.” Elijah, the prophet, was standing in front of me. I was so happy to see him. I remembered that the golden key he gave me was still in my pocket where I placed it when I entered the garden of the Devil. I pulled it out and wanted to return it to him, but he said, “Keep it. It might be still useful to you.”

I asked him, “did I fail to use this key in the right way all along? I always opened the wrong doors with it and I ended up in the wrong places where I didn’t belong. I don’t understand why I made the same mistake over and over again.”

“There were no mistakes, no errors done by you. You were guided by the

invisible hands of Destiny and opened the doors leading into the mysterious world of the unknown. You could not prevent or foresee the many unexpected surprises, mysteries, and miseries planned for you secretly. You got lost during your adventurous and mystical journey into the unknown.”

“Elijah, I am so confused and tired. I don’t know anymore where to go or where I truly belong. I lost myself. Please help me and advise me what to do.”

“I came here to help you. Come along with me and I will take you on a different, pleasant journey.”

I felt safe and secure walking with Elijah. I knew that he will finally take me to the right place and show me the right direction.

We walked together silently for a long time it seemed. We passed the green meadows scattered with blooming wild flowers. We crossed a forest of birch trees. We wandered through the tall, beautiful evergreens. We ventured deeper and deeper into the woods until we came to a clearing. From there we followed a narrow foot trail flanked by huge flowering linden trees. Their blossoms emitted a strong, pleasant, sweetish fragrance in the air. At the end of the trail we came to a small, simple cottage looking like a log cabin.

Suddenly, Elijah disappeared and I was alone wondering where I was and why did

Elijah vanish. I could see an iron gate leading to the entrance door of the cottage. It was late afternoon. The sun was setting and it was getting very cool. I decided to get into the cottage. I didn't feel comfortable to be alone outside and maybe face the situation of spending the night outdoors in that remote, solitary place with no one around. I headed towards the iron gate. It wasn't locked. I passed through it and I was at the front entrance of the cottage. It looked deserted.

I knocked on the door but no one came. It seemed nobody was inside. I turned the knob, but the door was locked. I was getting very uneasy, worried being all by myself. I felt abandoned. There was no sign of Elijah. Then I remembered I still had the golden key in my pocket. I also recalled Elijah telling me it could still be useful to me. He might have foreseen something when he said it. Maybe this is why he didn't want me to return it to him.

I was hoping that my key will open the door of the cabin for me and that maybe this time, this place will be the one where I belong, but I wasn't sure. But why am I here? What other unpredictable surprises and adversities are waiting for me behind the door? Nevertheless, I felt that I had no choice. I placed the key into the lock. It fitted perfectly the keyhole. I turned slowly the knob and opened the door.

The cottage looked much bigger from outside than from inside. It contained only

a small room. The only furniture in it was a large desk and a swivel chair behind it. It was strange because it looked so much like the desk and the chair in my study at our home. On the desk, I could see a big stack of papers, an oil lamp, a small container filled with ink, and a quill pen. I was surprised to see a modern desk and all those old-fashioned items on it. I was getting suspicious, wondering about the meaning of all that.

I locked the door behind me to assure my privacy. I sat down by the desk. It was getting dark. I wanted to light the oil lamp, but there were no matches around. I felt exhausted. I closed my eyes and waited for the appearance of Elijah. But he didn't show up. I felt hopeless and depressed. I put down my head on the desk and I fell asleep. I couldn't tell for how long I was sleeping, but when finally I opened my eyes, I could see that somebody lighted the oil lamp for me. My first thought was that probably Elijah was here with me. But as I looked up an angel was standing before me. The body and the face of the angel were covered by an opaque, thick, silky veil. Only two large extended wings were showing.

I was speechless, filled with consternation looking at the strange heavenly apparition. "Who are you and how did you get in here? Where am I?"

"I am the Spirit of Creativity. I got in here with my golden key which is just like yours. You are in the Spiritual Sanctuary. This is the place of your destination. You

belong to the world of fantasy and imagination.”

“Who am I?”

“You are the poet. I am your inspiration. I know you for thirty-seven years, ever since you wrote your first poem. I was at your side ¹² though all this time.” *through*

“Why didn’t you manifest yourself? Why did it take you so long to appear before me?”

“I was your silent, invisible, loyal companion. We always communicated with each other at this spiritual station.”

“And what’s the reason that you revealed yourself to me this time?”

“Because I couldn’t let you lose your spiritual self. I wanted to remind you who you are. You are a writer. See the papers and pen next to you? Pick up your pen and write.”

“I can’t do it. I’m tired, depressed, lonely. I have no imagination. I can’t write anymore.”

The Spirit of Creativity disappeared, but nevertheless I sensed the presence of my true, loyal, ethereal friend. I knew that my silent and devoted companion was still with me in the room. I heard the voice telling me, “What are you waiting for? Pick up your pen and write.”

A sheet of paper was placed before me by an invisible hand. The same hand lifted the quill pen, dipped it into the ink, and placed it between my fingers. And I began to write.

“Strange Visitor”

The spirit of poetry
Came to me
Long ago,
To reveal the many wonders
Of the mind,
Helping me to find
The road to eternity...

At our first encounter
I was distrustful,
Encompassed by fear,
Bewildered and shy,
Pondering why
Did this mysterious specter
Suddenly appear,
Like an angel
Sent from the sky...

Since then,
My life has never been the same-
Strange apparition
I know your name,
Miraculous Muse
You opened my heart,
Planting into it
The magic seeds of inspiration-
You penetrated my spirit
Starting its revolution,
Bringing forth new thoughts
And evolution...

Who sent to me
This friend of my soul
Who guides my thoughts
And leads the path of truth

Who holds within
Its mystic shrine
The sacred power
Of youth?

